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Eleanor Roosevelt Award

I am here on a kind of mission. I want to persuade everyone in this room that you ought to take CCC’s Community Leadership Course before you die. It should be on your bucket list. This course shaped my life and I want to thank Citizens’ Committee for Children for creating the course in 1962 and for offering it every year for the last fifty years.

I first took the course in 1983 at the insistence of my mother, Lily Auchincloss, and my godmother, Joanne Stern. I was 23 years old at the time and not so sure that these older, wiser women were hip to what was going on in the real world. But I was in the throes of “finding myself” and getting ready for graduate school in social work. I was quite cynical of the “hows” and “whys” of the world and suspected that the course might be filled with well-meaning and well-heeled do-gooders trying to fill idle time. And they were probably all over 50 – what did they know about curing poverty and saving the world – that was going to be my specialty.

What I discovered instead was a serious and informative class that had the goal of creating potential advocates for New York City’s Children and giving these advocates essential knowledge, training and experience to help them make a difference. The class participated in site visits in four of the five boroughs, we learned the facts about the lives of children in New York City and we heard lectures from experts in the field. In 1983, I remember being star struck when Ken Auletta spoke to the class about navigating New York City politics. I also remember a harrowing and eye-opening visit to the overburdened Manhattan Family Court and another visit to a mental health center on Wards Island. My fellow students did turn out to be mostly over 50, and to my 23 year old amazement, I actually learned from them and the seriousness of their desire to understand the problems and obstacles for poor people in New York City.
These many years later, I am taking the course again. I know a lot more now about what I don’t know than I did back then – and I wanted to refresh my understanding of the issues and services for children. My fellow students are an impressive array of women of all ages (This group just happens to be women – many men are graduates of the course). They are doctors, lawyers, social workers, mothers, and community organizers or potential community organizers. They have each committed every Wednesday from about 9 until 2 for ten weeks. All share a desire to understand city government and services. And though the students have changed (they all look a lot younger to me), the basic structure of the course is the same. We begin the day in small groups making site visits to different organizations that provide direct service to children and families. This is followed by a working lunch, roundtable discussion and lecture on some aspect of child welfare in New York.

We have learned some jarring statistics from Citizens’ Committee’s policy associates. As of 2010, there were 1,768,111 children in New York City – more than the entire population of Philadelphia. More than 520,000 children in New York are poor – that is almost 1 in 3. Only 49% of NYC public School 3rd graders read at or above grade level.

I know that I am preaching to the converted. Many of you have doubtless taken the course in the last fifty years. And if you are here at this very early hour, then you must believe that we as citizens of this city have a responsibility to our children. The problems of children in poverty are so vast and so diverse that we need systems that are in sync so that families on the edge can have an easier time navigating the waters.

It’s hard sometimes to see this, though. It’s hard to see the needs of those that are not always right in front of us – people struggling for a better life every day. The beauty of the course is that it takes you to the organizations where the needs are being addressed by dedicated people working for the city’s most vulnerable. Organizations like East New York Farms that provide access to healthy and affordable food. Places like Covenant House that provides shelter and safe space to homeless youth. And safe havens like Inwood House that care for pregnant teens in foster care. And the course also exposes you to the very real weaknesses in the system – like the overcrowded and bureaucratic family courts and the intricacies of the juvenile justice system.

In her introduction to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the United Nations, Eleanor Roosevelt said, “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; where he works… Without concerted citizen action close to home we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.” This truth has become all too clear to me in the years since I took the course in 1983 and in taking it again now in 2012. To save the world, we have to pay attention to those who are right in front of us.

I have met some wonderful people in the CLC course and have been especially impressed by the dedicated staff of Citizens’ Committee for Children. Policy experts Jennifer March-Joly, Stephanie Gendell, Pamela Corbett, Louise Feld, Moira Flavin, Caroline Nagy and Courtney Wolf have elucidated the ins and outs of the various state and city funding and systems for children. I would like to thank them, and course coordinators Chris Wasserstein, Katie Lobach and Phoebe Plagens and my fellow students for taking the course. I would also like to thank all of you in advance for taking the course. Did I mention you should take the course?
And because I don’t usually get to really thank the important people in my life, I would like to thank my sisters Lee Link and Gail Gilbert, both CLC course graduates and wonderful role models, my great mentor, dear friend and guardian angel, Agnes Gund, who has done more for this city and for children than anyone I know, and my husband Paul and daughter Lily who give me great love and keep me guessing every day. Thank you.

Albor Ruiz, New York Daily News Columnist
Samuel P. Peabody Award for Journalism

First I’d like to thank the Citizens’ Committee for Children for this award. It is a great privilege to receive a distinction such as this, which is especially meaningful for me because it comes from an organization that every day makes such a profound difference in the lives of thousands of children in our city.

I also feel privileged to have been able to write a column for the Daily News, for the last 12 years, a job that I love so much that I would do it for free (although I wouldn’t tell the owner). I love it so much because it allows me to help give a voice to those whose stories are often ignored by the mainstream media and to point out the challenges and injustices endured by thousands of New York families for reasons of poverty, language, national origin or race.

New York is my home and it can be a wonderful place, although not for everyone. Because as we all know, this is a city of startling contrasts and deep disparities where long lines at soup kitchens and food pantries are as much part of the urban landscape as the corner subway stop; a city where the greatest concentration of billionaires in the country coexist with a huge and growing population of poor people, many of whom seem to survive only by the grace of God.

Many of those poor people are children. As CCC has so effectively pointed out, to the city’s great shame, 1 in 3 children lives in poverty in New York City. We are talking about 520,770 children a number equal to the entire population of Sacramento!

The fact that this wonderful organization works so hard every day to give a future to these children, and with them, to our city, is something that I deeply admire and respect. Actually, I think it is the Citizens’ Committee for Children that really deserve the awards and accolades.

Jennifer March-Joly, CCC Executive Director

Good Morning. Thank you all for joining us in support of Citizens’ Committee for Children.

I would like to take a moment to offer my heartfelt thanks to our board, advocacy council members, and staff at CCC, who make the work we do so meaningful and for being so tireless in their efforts.

Thank you as well to master of ceremonies Juju Chang, and our keynote speaker Laurie Garduque, for their help in making this morning’s celebration a truly special event.

I would also like to congratulate our honorees, Albor Ruiz and Alexandra Herzan. While each of them is unique in their contributions, both are to be praised for their efforts to raise the level of awareness about the needs of New York City’s children and families.
I stand before you today, grateful for the opportunity to reflect on an incredibly successful year and eager to tackle with you the challenges before us. This year, on the state level, our work helped to establish the Close to Home Initiative, ensuring that more court-involved youth benefit from alternatives to incarceration, and that youth in need of placement can be served in their home communities. And on the city level, our work helped to save $150 million in funding for child care and after school services.

These successes were earned through year-round work at City Hall and in Albany, grounded in facts and importantly, they were secured through the engagement of a wide network of New Yorkers, including elected and appointed officials, service providers, parents and youth, and fellow advocates.

And yet, despite these incredible successes, if you take a look at the infographic that we’ve shared with you this morning, you can see the sheer magnitude of the challenges that New York City’s children continue to face today:

- 1 in 3 children in New York City lives in poverty;
- 1 in 12 babies is born underweight;
- 1 in 2 third graders reads below grade level;
- 56% of students from low-income families are not reading proficiently by third grade;
- 1 in 50 children in New York City has slept in a shelter this year; and
- 1 in 20 NYC children is reported neglected or abused.

We know that children who experience barriers to well-being like these early in life are at greater risk of facing challenges later on.

While this is daunting, I personally feel hopeful knowing that each of us in this room today is committed to providing our city’s children with better outcomes.

We know from research that investments in primary prevention – with each dollar spent on prenatal care, early childhood education, Youth Services, or child abuse prevention – produce not only better outcomes for children, but significant long-term savings of public dollars.

And we know too that there is real strength in numbers and power in collective action. Let’s talk specifically about one example of this – an effort that brought together so many of us in the past year – the Campaign for Children.

I’m sure we all agree that primary investments in early childhood education and consistent investments in school-age after school services provide children with critical educational opportunities that pave the way for future success. These much-needed services support a child’s social and emotional development and preparedness for school, as well as his or her ability to reach reading and math standards, stick with school, and avoid high-risk behavior. And we know these services allow parents to hold onto jobs, work hard, and support their families – while being able to ensure that their kids will receive safe and affordable care.

But these critical services are also economically beneficial at the community and city level – employing teachers and social workers; ensuring children have the basic ingredients to do well in school and in life; and providing them with the foundation to improve their chances of participating in the city’s global economy later in life.
Thanks to the tremendous efforts and support of coalition partners, citizen advocates, campaign funders, and elected and appointed leaders, we successfully raised awareness about the value of these services and the negative impact that proposed cuts in services would have on children, families and communities.

Highlights of the campaign’s efforts include: 5 borough-based reports; 29 press events; 4,500 calls to the Mayor and Deputy Mayors; 60,000 letters to elected leaders; non-stop presence at city hall; and 175 press hits, reaching every major news outlet including an endorsement by the New York Times editorial board.

Through these efforts, we made the case for significant short-term restorations which protected critical services for 47,000 children and youth. We also built the foundation for the public-will needed to secure long-term and sustained investments in these systems.

That said, there is still much to be done. And we are counting on your help. We must get through the immediate budget challenges – including the budget modification to be released in November and the plans for the 2014 budget to come in the new year. And we must push back against the belief that now is a time to cut back and do less – we need nothing less than a multi-year plan that ensures high quality child care and after school is universally accessible and affordable in every community.

As the infographic shows, early investments in children produce better outcomes and save public dollars in the long run.

In the current economic climate, we have even more reason to look at such critical investments for our city’s children. All of our efforts, including the Campaign for Children, must be about encouraging and demanding competition of ideas.

Some city leaders have already begun advancing ideas to expand early head start through social investment bonds, or pre-k and after school through surcharges on personal income. These are valuable proposals worth exploring, and the timing could not be more pressing.

With city elections next fall, we have the potential in the coming year to let our voices set the tone on behalf of New York’s children for the next decade or more.

It is up to us – everyone in this room – to make our city a better place for children. CCC will do its part by providing essential research that powers advocacy campaigns and informs New Yorkers and the media; by educating key decision makers and elected officials through briefings, lectures, and face to face meetings; and by expanding upon the constituency that advances children’s needs.

This is where we need all of you to take action.

It is critical that we find the means to effectively engage New Yorkers in the world of business – reaching the sectors of finance, real estate, health care, high-tech, and law. Business leaders must come to understand that New York’s children are tomorrow’s workforce and that businesses have a role to play in demanding that government make good on its investments.

We must also leverage the role of religious and civic leaders in helping community members find their voice – service providers, parents, youth – so that they too can make a claim on the future of this city.
CCC stands ready to help this diverse constituency speak out on behalf of children and we need your help to mobilize New Yorkers as well. You can help us by staying informed of the work of CCC: Attend CCC’s policy briefings; participate in our advocacy classes; and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

CCC will also launch a new and improved web site this month with a wealth of information and a new blog to keep our partners informed of the ways that you can join us and help make New York City a better city for children.

With new sharing tools on every page of the web site, we ask that you pass on our data, research, and action alerts to your friends and colleagues.

And given our success last year, we know too that when asked, you will also call, write and show up to rally on behalf of our city’s children.

We appreciate everything you’re doing. Considering the importance of the fight we are waging, every effort – no matter the size – can make a difference.

Finally, to our foundation, individual donors, and corporate supporters – thank you for all that you are doing. As a financially independent organization that raises every dollar of its budget from the ground up each year, CCC is humbled by your exceptional support and we urge you to please continue to support us this year and in the years ahead.

In sum, collectively we have the capacity to transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of New York City children and to improve upon our great city. Together, we must ensure that every child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

Thank you so much.

Laurie R. Garduque, Director of Justice Reform, The MacArthur Foundation Keynote Speaker

I would like to think the co-chairs of the breakfast Lee Link, Mahsa Pelosky, Nancy Solomon, and congratulate your award winners Alex and Albor. I am honored that Citizens’ Committee for Children asked me to speak. I want to commend you for the extraordinary work you do on behalf of all of New York’s children, especially your recent successes in promoting your “Close to Home” initiative that brings all of New York’s youth back from institutional placements far from home-- back to their communities to receive the treatment and rehabilitation they need and deserve.

Let me say, on a personal note that New York has played a role and set a course for my own career path and professional development. My initiation into the line of work I currently do as the Director of Justice grantmaking at the MacArthur Foundation started with a Congressional Science fellowship that was funded by the Foundation for Child Development, when Bert Brim had the vision to put academics to work and do good, and Barbara Blum whom we have recently lost, and Ruby Takanishi, secured and sustained.
After that, another prominent New York institution, the Carnegie Corporation, supported my work at the National Academy of Sciences, followed by me joining MacArthur, where a steady presence of advocates and leaders from New York has served on our board of directors, people like Margaret Mahoney and Elizabeth McCormick. So the Citizens’ Committee for Children, New York and I have much in common.

Our shared concern for reforming juvenile justice systems is why I’m here today. MacArthur Foundation’s signature effort in juvenile justice reform, the Models for Change initiative, believes that every young person should have the opportunity to grow up with a good education, get a job and participate in our communities. Creating a more fair and effective juvenile justice system that supports learning and growth and promotes accountability can ensure that all kids can grow up to be healthy, productive members of our society.

For more than 60 years, Citizens’ Committee for Children has acted from these same beliefs and looked out for the best interests of all kids, but especially those who are most vulnerable and at greatest risk. As a result, your organization, New York City and the State of New York have become influential leaders in standing up for and protecting young people helping to secure a brighter and more hopeful future, and the opportunity to fulfill their full potential.

New York City stands as the sentinel in this effort, leading the way in relying on knowledge of best practices to engage families and communities to better meet the needs of young people in trouble with the law, protect public safety, and save the taxpayer dollar. The City has gotten smart on crime, using data and information to drive decision making, resulting in dramatic reductions in the number of youths in detention and in out of home placements, and more appropriate use of community sanctions and services. The City wants to ensure its funds are well spent and holds itself accountable not only for protecting public safety but producing positive outcomes for youth, their families and communities.

The City's approach to testing models and investing its own resources, as well as Citizens’ Committee for Children’s advocacy in support of Close to Home has made a huge difference. This kind of public-private partnership and relationship of mutual trust and respect is critical to ensure continued progress in systems reform. Systems reform is not a model program, or a new initiative, but coordinated changes in policies, practices, people and infrastructure. It’s not a sprint, not even a marathon, but a journey. We want to ensure that not only are kids today entering the juvenile justice system better off than kids four years ago, but that kids entering the system four years from now are better off than now.

As someone with a background as researcher and scientist, I also deeply appreciate your approach to thoughtful advocacy grounded in evidence. It is Citizens’ Committee for Children’s commitment to the facts and to action that will allow me later to point out a similarity between New York and North Carolina. And in advance I want you to know, it’s not a love for Broadway musicals.

I’ve been asked to talk this morning about the state of juvenile justice reform and the prospects ahead. Before we talk about the future, a very brief bit of history is in order. For over a century, the United States has had a separate justice system for children. Since the first court was established in Cook County Illinois, it has withstood attacks, seen its boundaries eroded, and often lost its way. But its mission is still intact – children are not adults, and the law should treat them accordingly. Both New York City and Chicago benefitted from the positive influence of the settlement house movement and the efforts of the progressive vanguard to look after the education and social service needs of children and their families. These movements set the stage for how we viewed young people and their ability to grow and change.
However in the 1990s, the system was in crisis when a rise in violent crime created a moral panic, and “tough on crime” policies and threats of a coming wave of youthful super predators resulted in harsh punitive measure being enacted across the country. The notion of rehabilitation took a back seat to punishment and incarceration.

That trend continued into the next century with an extraordinary number of young people ending up in incarcerated, often for non-violent offenses. While crack-downs arguably had some effect in terms of taking potential offenders off the street, the evidence of the harm to the youth who were incarcerated at no appreciable gain in public safety has been much more compelling.

The MacArthur Foundation decided that we weren’t in a position to effectively respond to this punitive backlash because the base of evidence on the costs and consequences of treating youthful offenders as if they were no longer young was so incomplete. We established the Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice that produced truly game-changing work on culpability, competence to stand trial and youths’ capacity to change. What the research evidence established is that the “reforms” were fundamentally unfair, unjust and inhumane.

With a solid base of research in hand we set out to reverse the tide, to create a new wave of reform to move states toward more fair, effective, and rational juvenile justice systems. We launched Models for Change to assist states in developing their own blueprints for reforming their own juvenile justice systems. We shared a set of values about respecting developmental differences, protecting public safety and the need for greater racial and ethnic fairness, but did not tell the states what to do. They set priorities and started to work. They demonstrate best practices at the local level, and align state policy to support and spread to the model to other jurisdictions, and inspire other states to follow.

They have achieved notable successes in law reform and in policy and practice innovations: kids with mental health needs or who are involved with the child welfare system are being diverted from the system entirely, fewer kids are locked up, more kids are receiving community evidence-based services, more of them have attorneys providing zealous advocacy earlier in the process, and kids of color suffer less harm.

After nearly a decade of success, that effort is transitioning from building models to spreading reform through a variety of educational, policy and communications efforts. Through partnerships with federal agencies, Models for Change policy and practice innovations are taking hold in over 30 states.

While Models for Change was working on the front end, in New York and other states, there was growing discontent with the high cost and ineffectiveness of punitive approaches. Locking kids up wasn’t working.

Bold new leadership has ushered in a new era of reform, re-inventing the paradigm from arrest to new alternatives to court and incarceration, creating a stark contrast with the lock them up and toss away the key approach.

Let me insert a footnote on how far justice reform can take us in improving the lives of vulnerable children and families. Indeed, we can only succeed if all systems affecting young people do their part effectively. The juvenile justice system cannot bear the burden of rescuing children or creating services to address the failures of another youth-serving system. The juvenile justice system shouldn’t provide education, mental health and substance abuse treatment, or housing for kids. It shouldn’t be a safe harbor for kids abused and neglected. And probation officers shouldn’t be the first line case managers or education advocates.
The juvenile justice system should be offering indigent defense and zealous advocacy for children, and engaging families and communities to take responsibility for holding kids accountable for their mistakes. We have to teach young people new skills and guide them toward becoming productive members of society. But, on that path, the juvenile justice system should not be asked to serve as a surrogate family, school, health and mental health care system or foster care agency. Those systems must be supported and held accountable for playing their part effectively. Until every child is healthy, housed, educated and safe, the juvenile justice system will struggle to address needs it is not equipped to handle on its own.

New York has been a leader in so many ways. From the extraordinary work of Citizens’ Committee for Children, New York City leaders and Governor Cuomo to institute the Close to Home legislation to bring kids back to their communities and close youth prisons, to the work of individual advocates like Judge Michael Corriero at the New York Center for Juvenile Justice who speaks to audiences across the country about reform, New York is clearly a leader in almost every area of juvenile justice reform.

I think that most of us in this room know the one area that is lagging. As I commented earlier, New York shares with North Carolina, the unfortunate distinction of being the only two states in the US that prosecute all 16- and 17-year-olds charged with a crime in the adult criminal justice system, regardless of the severity of their alleged crimes. This is really an unfortunate distinction considering how progressive and successive juvenile justice reforms have been in this state. We also know that Raising the Age is a Citizens’ Committee for Children priority

This leads me to talk about what is on the horizon when states as diverse as Texas, Ohio, Colorado, Louisiana, and California have enacted major juvenile justice reforms in just the past year.

The MacArthur Foundation and many others believe that we are facing the best opportunity in two decades for reversing the direction of juvenile justice systems in this country, returning to the principles of fairness and recognition of developmental and individual differences on which the juvenile court was originally founded.

We have a considerable base of evidence clearly demonstrating how young people are substantially different from adults and the neuroscience to help explain developmental immaturity and why they get into trouble with the law and they are also, under the right circumstances, capable of positive change.

In the last five years, the US Supreme Court has relied upon the research to say that adolescents are not adults, and because of their immaturity abolished the juvenile death penalty, eliminated juvenile life without parole sentences for non-homicide offenses, and mandatory life without parole for homicide.

We have successful models for action at the state and local level in every region of the country. We have models, answers, solutions, strategies, tools, resources and leadership. The MacArthur Foundation has a goal. We want to see a wave of juvenile justice reforms sweep the nation. To accomplish that goal on behalf of the futures of all the youth that encounter the juvenile justice system will require tremendous communications, advocacy, education and leadership.

New York has been a leading light of reform in the US. The rest of the country needs more powerful examples of success to help bring along the less-enlightened states where reformers face deep resistance to change. While I don’t want to belabor this one point, Raising the Age in New York State and joining the other 48 states already there, will not only changes the lives of New York’s children, but can send a
message across the country that reform is not only inevitable, but that it is desirable and effective and good for public safety. We need New York as an unfettered champion of reform. You are almost there. I am here both to applaud your tremendous work so far, and to cheer you on.

No one knows when a single horrific youth crime will capture the public eye and when someone running for office will see it as an opportunity to attack reforms. We know that the window of opportunity for reform is now open and that we must move with all deliberate speed to accomplish as much as possible.

The MacArthur Foundation and Models for Change see 2013 as a pivotal year for pushing the need for sweeping national progress on juvenile justice issues. We are investing heavily in communications and education. But our core business is grant-making. We depend on the passion and commitment and dedication of the people in and outside of the system to make a difference. Those efforts depend on states like New York offering models and inspiration for how to solve difficult problems and put the needs of kids first. Together, we can undo the damage of a few decades and usher in another century of progress for how we treat our youth.

Thank you.